

Issue 12: Book Reviews

Deleuze and Horror Film

By Anna Powell

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-74861-748-7. viii + 232 pp. £16.99 (pbk)

A Review by Edmund P. Cueva, Xavier University, USA

It is often difficult to review a book that has as its goal to supply a new "approach" in a field already bursting at the seams with methodologies, ways of reading, modes of analysis, interpretative schemata, etc. It may be a demanding task to write a review such as this, but without a doubt it is always satisfying to read a thoughtful and inventive contribution to the discipline, especially when it challenges the standard and recommended procedure of doing things. Moreover, it revivifies films that, for the most part, have been examined to death with the expected structural or psychoanalytical objective. Some of the author's conclusions or statements made the reviewer pause and rethink the films covered in the text. It should be noted that this is not an easy text to appreciate or internalize at first. A measured and unhurried evaluation is necessary.

Anna Powell notes in her introduction that she wishes to give a new direction in horror film studies that acknowledges that the complexity of films needs to take into account more than "a predetermined overlay of symbolic or structural meaning" (1). The innovative point in the compass to the author's new path for film studies is the work done primarily by Giles Deleuze, whose significant translated works include *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (The Athlone Press, 1983), *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (The Athlone Press, 1989), *Bergsonism* (Zone Books, 1991), and 'The Brain is the Screen' (in *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman [University of Minnesota Press, 2000]). Félix Guattari (*Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, Penguin, 1984; *Chaosmosis: An Ethico Aesthetic Paradigm*, Power Publications, 1995) is also a source. In addition, Powell relies closely on the writings of Henri Bergson, the author of such works as *Creative Evolution* (University Press of America, 1983), *Matter and Memory* (Zone Books, 1991), and *Duration and Simultaneity* (Clinamen Press, 1999).

A stumbling block in reviewing a book such as this one by Powell originates in the complex and prolix terminology used by the author, who borrows terms, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs from Deleuze and Bergson in an attempt to develop her own system of film-philosophy. The constant verbatim reliance on these other authors distracts the reader from what the author is trying to say. The intricacy of her book is made evident by the inclusion of a glossary of key terms: Affect, Affection-Image, Anomaly/Anomalous, Assemblage, Becoming, Body-Without-Organs,

Diagrammatic Component, Duration/Space-Time, Extensive/Intensive, Haecceity, Haptic/ity, Line of Flight, Machinic, Molecular/Molar, Movement-Image, Schizoanalysis, Singularity, Time-Image, and Vitalism, *flan Vital*. The glossary is meant for the reader familiar with the language and neologisms of Deleuze, Guattari, and Bergson. In fact, the glosses themselves are at times somewhat convoluted or moving toward the unintelligible. For example, the definition of "Haecceity":

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Haecceity is the quality of 'this-ness' in a 'thing-in-itself'. Haecceities are intensive states experienced by the automatic or auto-erotic movements of machinic desire rather than by psychoanalytic subject. The use of colour, the timbre of a voice or the rhythm of a movement are cinematic haecceities. Horror film offers distinctive aural experiences, such as the different tonal qualities in *The Shining*, when a tricycle [sic] rumbles over the wooden floorboards of glides over the carpet. Such sensory haecceities are not reducible to symbolic meaning. (212)

This explanation is one of the easier entries to understand. This is not to say the theoretical vocabulary drowns out completely what Powell is trying to say, but rather the discussions that precede the analyses of the films create a dissonance with what has been said previously or is said afterwards. The sophistication of the argument disappears when Powell proceeds to apply her conceptual methodology to the films.

Another wrinkle in the presentation is the lack of a clear-cut definition of what the author means by horror. Powell's statement that not all of her texts fall into a "strict generic category . . . but all contain horrifying material of an uncanny nature" (7) does not help the reader understand why the author chose the films that she did for her inquiry. Nor does her reliance on the Oxford English Dictionary entry that specifies the inclusion of violence and the supernatural help clarify the selection of films. The brief etymological review of the Latin *horrere* only creates further complication. For example, *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997), *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1926), *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), *Demon Seed* (Donald Cammell, 1977), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932), *Event Horizon* (Paul Anderson, 1997), *Hardware* (Richard Stanley, 1990), *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963), *Hellraiser* (Clive Barker, 1987), *The Hollow Man* (Paul Verhoeven, 2000), *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, 1993), *The Masque of the Red Death* (Roger Corman, 1964), *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922), *Repulsion* (Roman Polanski, 1965), *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *Suspria* (Dario Argento, 1977), *The Vampire Lovers* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970), *Vampyr* (Carl-Theodor Dreyer, 1931), *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1982), and *Les Yeux sans Visage* (Georges Franju, 1959) are included in her collection of texts. It can be argued that the films by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Donald Cammell, Paul Anderson, and Richard Stanley belong to the science-fiction category, and those by Adrian Lyne, David Lynch, and Oliver Stone to the psychological thriller or suspense genres. Works by Noël Carroll (*The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, Routledge, 1990) and Yvonne Leffler (*Horror as Pleasure: The Aesthetics of Horror Fiction*, Almqvist & Wiksell, 2000) or similar works which could have been used to explain Powell's motivation for her choice of films, are absent from this book's bibliography.

However, *Deleuze and Horror Film* is a fine book in that it does what it sets out to do. It moves away from the customary psychoanalytic focus on "the genre's unconscious mechanisms to embody the experience of horror" (205). It applies Deleuzian models to horror film and demonstrates that

the mind of the spectator is indeed transformed, his perceptions altered, and the "mundane modes of consciousness" (201) are extended and changed. Most importantly, Powell's examination should begin to reset the way in which films are discussed and explored.

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Institute of Film & Television Studies, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK
E-Mail: scope@nottingham.ac.uk | Tel: +44 (0)115 951 4261 | Fax: +44 (0)115 951 4270

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